

Rev Fr John Stevens, C.S.S.R. (1829-1899)

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John Stevens was born at Dudley, on the 14th of April, 1829 the day of Catholic Emancipation. His parents were religious Anglicans. When thirteen he was sent to school in France, and later to Munich, in Germany, where, when still only a boy, he became a Catholic in 1845. After this he studied at St. Edmund's College, until 1850, when he entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. He was professed at St. Trond, in Belgium, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1851. He had as fellow-student [Father Bridgett](#), and both were ordained Priests, at Liege, on the 4th of August, 1856.

Father Stevens was Father Furniss' first and greatest helper in children's Missions. It was a great disappointment to him when, in 1860, he was taken from the Missions and made Novice Master. He discharged all the duties of this most important office for two long periods, so that he formed several generations of Redemptorists. He was Rector at Clapham and Bishop Eton (England), but he was best known in Limerick (Ireland) as Director of the Holy Family. He gave himself, heart and soul, to the men from 1871 to 1874, and his success was very great. All through his priestly life he was most devoted to men, and he would leave nothing undone to help them in their difficulties and temptations. He never lost courage, and persevered in his endeavours until he had made those under his care good-living Christians. He gave a great number of Missions and retreats to all classes. When age began to tell upon him, he went less on Missions, but to the very end he laboured much at home.



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In 1899 there was an evident decline in his health and strength. Still he worked on. In September he went to a small place in the north of Scotland, called Chapelton, to give the renewal of a Mission. It was there he was called away to his reward. We give a short extract from an account of his illness and death, written by the confrere who was with him.

"After Father Stevens had received the last Sacraments he told me that there was nothing troubling him. Then his feelings overcame him and in a few short touching words, with tears flowing from his eyes, he said that he was resigned to die far away from his brethren; that he was in the keeping of Divine Providence; that he had always been devoted to God's Providence, and now trusted that Divine Providence would not abandon him in his last moments. 'I think,' he added, 'my father, Alphonsus, will intercede for me at the last. He is my father and I have worked hard and long in the Congregation.' Truly Divine Providence did not abandon him at the end, and when the last moments came and he was in his agony a look of intense delight was in his face to see me at his bedside ready to give him the last absolution and to pray with him. His agony was short and his death most peaceful.

"Before he died he renewed aloud the Religious Vows which well nigh fifty years before he had made kneeling before the altar of the little Novitiate Chapel at St. Trond. Now, at the age of seventy, he goes to receive his reward."

Father Stevens was remembered by the people for whom he worked as a most priestly and zealous man, and amongst Redemptorists as a most sympathetic confrere. With those especially whose first days in the Congregation brought them into such intimate relations with him as their Novice Master, the memory of him will remain as that of a saintly and affectionate father. †